

THE REBELLION BEGINS IN ESSEX

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They were now to learn that war had its dangers as well as its delights. Our trading vessels were swept off the seas, our coast towns were burnt. Military habits made the nobles bad citizens, and the contagion of disobedience, violence and robbery had spread through classes that had never seen the fields of France. It was necessary for the governors to crush the country with taxation, for borrowing on a large scale was no longer possible to their shattered credit. The country, eager as it was for military success, would not bear this burden, and made the collectors' task dangerous and impossible. The collectors themselves were corrupt, and dishonest. So was a large part of the public service. The Good Parliament had done something to put a better face on things, and to introduce a certain responsibility among the ministers. But the same inefficiency, stupidity and corruption which had helped to ruin our affairs in France before 1376, still continued in a lesser degree during the early years of Richard. The country felt a deep distrust of the government, and one object of the rebels in '81 was to protest against the King's principal advisers, as well as against the corrupt and oppressive officials of lower rank, who came into direct contact with the people. The government in its purely administrative aspect had done much to hasten and aggravate the Rising, though it was primarily the result of social and economic troubles.

In Kent and Essex the insurrections were similar. Both arose in the first instance from the action of the poll-tax commissions. It appears that the disturbances began in Essex. It was about the last week of May that Thomas Bampton came down to Brentwood, a small town eighteen miles north-east of London. Sitting there at the receipt of custom, he summoned before him the inhabitants of Fobbing, Cor-ringham, and Stanford-le-Hope, a group of villages lying ten miles further south, on the lower Thames, not far from Tilbury. It was in vain that the men of Fobbing pleaded a quittance received from the commissioners who had levied the tax during the winter. Bampton was inexorable. He insisted on a second inquiry into their population and taxable resources. He threatened them with penalties for their contumacy, and seemed disposed to rely on the support of the